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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000707

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SUBJECT: IN-FIGHTING AND DISORGANIZATION STAGNATES UDF  
MOVEMENT

REF: MINSK 692

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GEORGE KROL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The internal power struggles and disorganization within the United Democratic Forces (UDF) are affecting the UDF's support among democratic-minded Belarusians and its ability to initiate a formable movement against Lukashenko. At least two clans have formed in the UDF and are butting heads over strategies and leadership positions while ignoring their supporters. Tired of waiting for orders from the national leadership, regional activists are independently initiating their own campaigns and working together to keep supporters motivated and united. However, some activists and civil society groups, disgusted with the infighting, are abandoning the UDF to pursue their own agenda. End Summary.

Lebedko V. Milinkevich  
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¶2. (C) The power struggle between the United Civic Party (UCP) leader Anatoly Lebedko and Coalition presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich has split the United Democratic Forces (UDF) into at least two groups. Lebedko—still angry that Milinkevich was chosen as the single candidate—and his supporters (the UCP, Belarusian Communist Party (BCP), youth group Malady Front) maintain that the October Congress of Democratic Forces chose Milinkevich as the Coalition's presidential candidate, not as the UDF leader. Therefore, they believe a second congress may be needed to "reevaluate" the UDF's structure and activities.

¶3. (C) On July 4, UCP deputy Igor Shinkarik reiterated as much to Pol/Econ Chief. Although he claimed that the congress' purpose would be to legitimize the UDF's activities and to officially include in the UDF other democratic groups, such as presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin's party and tent city demonstrators, he unconvincingly denied that the UCP would use the congress to call Milinkevich's leadership into question. Shinkarik admitted that talks over holding a second congress had produced a stalemate in the UDF, but claimed this was temporary, as the UCP was "converting" other UDF members, such as BPC leader Sergey Kalyakin and Malady Front, to their side. Shinkarik noted that if agreement on the need for a congress could not be reached, the UCP and other opposition forces would de facto carry on with their activities without Milinkevich.

No Agreement On Action Plan  
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¶4. (C) A clear line between the Lebedko and Milinkevich clans was drawn during the June 27 sitting of the UDF political

council. The council, comprised of political party leaders of the Ten Plus Coalition and headed by Milinkevich, approved the UDF's one-year action plan, "Guidelines of the UDF in July 2006-July 2007 (reftel), but did not reach a consensus on who would sit on the executive committee in charge of implementing the plan.

15. (C) According to Belarusian Popular Front deputy Viktor Ivashkevich, Lebedko and Kalyakin voiced opposition to the one-year plan, calling it vague. However, when Lebedko and Kalyakin introduced their agenda for summer 2006, "The Plan Of Four Actions"-calling for the collection of signatures to contest the presidential election results, the creation of an initiative group to demand the annulations of the labor contract system, preparation for local elections, and a campaign for the release of political prisoners (Solidarity for Freedom)-the BPF rejected it as "inefficient" and excessively dependent on street actions. The majority of the political council agreed with the BPF and rejected the plan. Angered, the UCP published a article on its website titled, "The Coalition Selves Summer Plan," that interpreted the political council session as a conflict between the proactive UCP and the passive majority. The BPF website responded, claiming it was the UCP, not the BPF, who was inactive.

#### A Split In The UDF

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16. (C) After the upset at the political council, the UCP declared it would maintain bi and multilateral relations with UDF members, but would act independently in cooperation with the National Committee (headed by Lebedko), hinting at de facto secession. Shinkarik pointed out that even though the UDF political council approved the one-year action plan,

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the democratic coalition will not likely follow up on the document. Basic questions, such as which groups or people will take responsibility for each activity and when should these activities be implemented, were left unanswered. Shinkarik suggested to Pol/Econ Chief that the inherent ambiguities in the action plan reflect the unwillingness of coalition members to seriously coordinate initiatives and programs.

#### UDF Problems Result In Frustration, Loss of Supporters

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17. (C) Deputy leader of the UDF and manager for Milinkevich's campaign team Viktor Korniyenko on June 22 confirmed for Pol/Econ Chief that Lebedko's and Milinkevich's battle for power had immobilized the UDF. In fact, the infighting and stalemate had become so serious that Korniyenko suggested he would resign from the UDF political council should the infighting continue into the fall.

18. (C) Alyona Volynets of the Belarusian Assembly of Democratic NGOs in a June 27 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief and Poloff criticized the UDF's indecisiveness. She noted that as a result, the UDF failed to attract the youth, who now prefer to operate independently without directions from the UDF. Volynets cited as an example the flash mob groups' immediate rejection of UDF attempts to unite and coordinate all flash mobs. The NGO leader criticized the UDF's reluctance to listen to NGOs and civil society and inability to initiate activities other than election campaigns and congresses. Volynets, whose umbrella organization has an advisory position on the UDF political council, suggested the UDF initiate a campaign to impeach Lukashenko via demonstrations and the Belarusian legal system. Such a campaign, she argued, would keep supporters united. The UDF leadership refused. (Note: Shinkarik on July 4 told Pol/Econ Chief that for the same reasons above, several civil society groups refuse to work with the UDF and are pursuing their own activities.)

¶9. (C) Emboffs at the Embassy July 4th celebration heard the same threats to leave the opposition from prominent activists. Ales Korniyenko of the Limon youth group in Gomel and once active supporter of both the UCP and BPF told PolOff that he and his colleagues quit the opposition due to its disorganization and infighting. He explained that many Belarusians support change, but were not willing to stick their necks out if there was no hope, and they do not see any within the current opposition.

#### Local Political Parties, Not UDF, Begin Campaigning

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¶10. (C) Regional and mid-level BPF leaders on June 23 told Poloff that while the UDF was occupied with its problems, regional political parties and organizations have initiated their own activities in order to keep activists motivated and not lose the support they built up during the presidential elections. The GOB in June announced elections for local and district soviets would tentatively be held January 2007. Not surprisingly, the UDF has not agreed on a specific strategy nor has it started campaigning. However, the individual political parties and local candidates were already conducting informal campaign meetings with supporters.

#### Comment

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¶11. (C) While the UDF leadership continues to publicly stress unity--Kalyakin told Ambassador on June 26 that the divisions in the UDF were not a major problem and Milinkevich pitched a unified front in his recent trip to Grodno--working-level party officials tell Emboffs that the split between the UCP and BPF runs so deep that it is unlikely that they could closely work together in the near future. To be sure, the leadership of the UDF is comprised of intelligent and talented individuals who make good impressions while abroad, but in country they have not demonstrated an ability to work together or organize for a sustained period of time. Unfortunately, this has taken its toll on their civil society supporters, who have grown impatient with the UDF and have made plans independent of the coalition.

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